



Fifth Sunday in Lent  
26 March 2023

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

I am always willing to share the moments of my life from this vantage point. The pulpit, for your pastors, is both awe inspiring and deeply humbling. In my own faith journey, the words that are spoken from the pulpit can be life- changing and, if I am being honest, incredibly boring at times. I try to offer more of the first. Measuring my preaching against Pastor Tony and Pastor Edwin easily keeps me on my toes.

Last Thursday, our junior high students took our biennial field trip to the funeral home. It is always met with a little trepidation, some hesitancy, and well expectation – because the funeral home provides ice cream treats for dessert. I mean if you are going to the funeral home – you should get dessert when you are all done. What I appreciate the most is the removal of the mystery and the fear of what it means to enter the funeral home. The mystery of death is not answered – but at least the process of what happens to a body after death is demystified. How is the body cared for? How do you preserve the body? What does it mean to cremate the body? Will the body smell? The funeral home field trip answers questions that have been burning deep inside. Today we have some of those same burning questions dep inside of us.

Today is the dry run for Jesus, don't you think? Certainly, we can be led down that road—Jesus raising Lazarus leads us in the direction that we are being prepared for the same event on a grander scale. Sitting here today—we know that is true—in some respects...Easter will be upon us regardless of how terrible the journey over the next two weeks. And yet for the disciples, for Mary and Martha, for Lazarus for that matter—there is no Easter—only these moments in Bethany. They have all seen an awful lot in their brief journey with Jesus. Healing, teaching, forgiveness, cleansing—but today—to see Jesus at the tomb of his friend Lazarus—well, what could Jesus possibly do? Even he cannot raise the dead, can he?

Episcopal Priest and author, Barbara Brown Taylor writes...God has woven resurrection into our daily lives so we can learn the shape of it and perhaps learn to trust the strength of it when our own time comes. I wish that were true. Oh, I believe God has woven resurrection into our lives for us to witness and experience—but I think we have a hard time learning the shape of it and trusting in the strength of it when our time comes. Some of us certainly are able to walk down that road. We know that death will come and some of us are ready. Come on death—I am ready to go...I doubt most of us are in that camp. Since Lazarus was not old but ill—I wonder if he was ready for the arrival of death at his bedside. Certainly, Mary and Martha were not prepared or anticipating the death of their brother. And somewhere in the middle of all of this, Jesus is calm and collected and seems to be in charge from the moment he hears of the illness that has overcome Lazarus. I am led to believe you and I are never so calm in hearing the news of loved ones taking ill or suddenly passing away.

Mary and Martha only wanted just a moment with their Savior as their brother was dying. Some words of peace or at the farthest hope a miracle. We look for them, especially, in the lowest valley of our pain. Come on God—just one little miracle. A blink of your eye can change everything. Just will it to be done and it will be. From death you bring life O God. From the grave you are able to call us back to life. That is all we want O God. It is not so much to ask. You called Adam from the dust of the earth and Eve from Adam's rib. Look, God this one is already put together. There isn't any work here. Just open his eyes, breathe life back into his lungs, and let his heart beat with the rhythm of your power—with the life that gushes from your open hand. And yet there is nothing. Perhaps the words of Jesus are more important than we thought as we hear this story today.

Eternal life begins not at the end of time, or at the time of death, but right now in this moment. Jesus did not say, "I will be the resurrection," or "It is coming soon." He said simply, "I am the resurrection." Here and now. I am the resurrection. Jesus brings the joy of life into our days. And yet, I know even as we carry that life



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with us into our week—we will be weighed down with the troubles of our worries, the tears of friends, the pain of the life we live not exactly being the life we want, expect, or feel we can change. And what do we hear from Jesus—I am the resurrection.

I wrote an entire paper—22 pages for a Greek, New Testament class on the experience of the resurrection. I don't have the paper anymore. I remember little of my Greek class. And yet what I will remember for my entire life are the words of the professor on the last page of the paper...

In the face of death, defeat, and despair, you bring us new life. Help us not to submit to the forces of death. Call us forth to life. Give us the courage to join in your revolution, to take our place in the great victory that you offer to rise with you. For all the ways that we betray your victory of life over death, forgive us. Help us to follow you into the future that you offer. Amen.

Let us pray...Lord Jesus, thank you for tears cried so openly. You have given not only dignity to our grief but freedom to our emotions. Thank you for the beautiful tribute that tears are to the dead, telling them they were loves and will be missed. Help us to realize that if the death of a loved one was difficult for you – the resurrection and the life – then I need never be ashamed when it is difficult for me. That you that you know what it is like to lose someone you love. And for the assurance that when we come to you in our grief, you know how we feel. Thank you for reminding us that our tears can evoke your own. Help us to follow the trail of tears you left behind on the way to Lazarus' tomb so that we may learn to weep with those who weep. Help us to feel the pain they feel...the uncertainty...the fear...the heaviness...the regret...the despair.

We pray for all who grieve the loss of a loved one: for the one who has lost a parent, for the one who has lost a child, for the one who has lost a grandparent, for the one who has lost a sister, for the one who has lost a brother, for the one who has lost a friend. We pray for healing holy One – for your healing touch that can calm our fears, divide our worries, mend our broken relationships, cover our failings, release our regrets, heal our sorrows, soften our hard heartedness, free us from our anger, and bring faith to our doubt. It is by your grace alone that we come to you this day and every day. Amen.